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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL
FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Note verbale dated 27 March 2002 from the Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the secretariat of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of Myanmar to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations at Geneva presents its compliments to the secretariat of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights and has the honour to enclose, herewith, a copy of a memorandum concerning the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

The Permanent Mission would be grateful if the afore-mentioned document* could be circulated as an official document of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights under agenda item 9.

* Reproduced as received, in English only.



Annex

Myanmar today in a nutshell

A good understanding of 5 fundamental phenomena --- 3 specific characteristics, a vision and one political process in Myanmar --- is essential to a full and proper appreciation of the current situation in Myanmar.

The first characteristic specific to Myanmar is that Myanmar is a multi-racial society with 135 national races.

The second specific characteristic is its strategic geopolitical position, forming a link between South Asia and South-East Asia and situated alongside the biggest and most powerful Asian neighbouring countries.

The third specific characteristic is that the problem of insurgency and that of maintaining peace and tranquillity have bedevilled the country since its independence in 1948 until recently.

A vision shared by all the Myanmar people is to establish a peaceful, modern and developed democratic state.

The most important current political process, taking place in Myanmar, is the constitution-making process through the National Convention that will lead to the emergence of a strong and enduring state constitution and the subsequent election of a democratic government in accordance with the new constitution.

Because of these characteristics specific to Myanmar, the following are the foremost national tasks,

- to safeguard and consolidate unity and solidarity among the national races;
- to maintain peace and tranquillity throughout the country;
- to safeguard non-disintegration of the Union and sovereignty and to pursue an independent and active foreign policy.

The concrete achievements, accomplished by the State Peace and Development Council since its advent in 1988, include, among other things,

- the prevalence of peace and tranquillity throughout the country;
- an unprecedented degree of national unity and reconsolidation; 17 armed groups, except one faction, have returned to the legal fold and joined hands with the Government. Only one faction of the KNU remains outside the legal fold.
- the significant economic progress, and the social and cultural uplift and the improvement of the living standards of the people;

Myanmar's economy has registered a healthy average growth rate of around 8.4 percent in second five-year plan for 1996-1997 to 2000-2001.

- the infrastructure-building on an unprecedented scale throughout the whole country;

The Government has completed to-date 170 new bridges including 9 new major river-crossing bridges,

129 new dams, 120 new hospitals, 6223 new basic education schools, 112 new universities and colleges, and 4239 miles of road, to mention just a few statistics; and

- the border area development on an unprecedented scale for national races living in frontier areas.

Inspired by the aforementioned vision, the Myanmar Government and the people are laying down a firm foundation to establish a peaceful, modern and developed democratic state through the process of the National Convention. They are also striving with verve and vigour to develop the country and to improve the well-being and political, economic and social life of the entire nation. In so doing, they are, indeed, most effectively protecting and promoting fundamental human rights and advancing the right to development.

The following memorandum offers a fairly comprehensive and yet concise overview of the positive developments in Myanmar.

The present memorandum has been prepared for the ready reference of the members of the Commission on Human Rights and observer delegations in order to enable them to better understand the real situation prevailing in the Union of Myanmar.

It is hoped that the participants of the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights will take into account these specific characteristics of Myanmar and the positive developments in the country and will view this question from a more objective and balanced perspective.

Introduction

The fifty-seventh session of the Commission on Human Rights adopted on 18 April 2001, resolution 2001/15 on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. Resolution 2001/15 decided to continue its consideration of the situation of human rights in Myanmar at the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights. The resolution, *inter alia*, urged the Government of the Union of Myanmar to take certain measures in some areas of concern to the international community.

Following the adoption of the draft resolution, the Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar H.E. U Mya Than stated that the resolution welcomed the positive steps taken by the Government of Myanmar for promotion and protection of human rights in the country and that the resolution, among other things, took special note of the establishment of the Human Rights Committee that would pave the way for the establishment, in due course, of a full-fledged national institution.

It also welcomed the assistance of the Government of Myanmar in facilitating the exploratory visit by the newly appointed Special Rapporteur to Myanmar. It further welcomed the releases from detentions of a large number of detainees. The resolution welcomed the continued cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

At the same time, the Permanent Representative pointed out that the resolution still was very much negative resolution and contained many unfounded allegations such as making sweeping conclusion that the composition and the working procedures of the National Convention do not permit members-elect of the Pyithu Hluttaw (Parliament), and representatives of national races to freely express their views and to the effect that they do not really contribute to the process of democratization.

As such, the Permanent Representative stated that the Myanmar delegation dissociated itself from those negative elements in the draft resolution as well as from the draft resolution as a whole.

This, however, does not alter Myanmar's consistent policy of cooperating with the United Nations to the fullest extent possible. It also continues to demonstrate its sensitivity to and the understanding of the concern of the international community.

Significant positive developments during the period under review

During the period under review by the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights, Myanmar has indeed, witnessed a number of significant positive developments such as restoring national consolidation and peace and stability in the nation; developing economic infrastructures; promoting the economic strength; developing the human resources of the nation; uplifting the social sector; and extending the regional and international cooperation, which are outlined below for favour of careful consideration by the member and observer delegations.

Efforts for the prevalence of peace and stability

Peace and development are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Development is not achievable in any country without first establishing peace.

Drawing lessons from the post-independence history of the country replete with the armed insurrections of the ethnic groups, resulting primarily from the divide-and-rule policy of the British colonial administration during the colonial era, the Government strongly believes that lasting peace can be achieved only through the strengthening of the unity among the national races. This belief led the Government to undertake energetic efforts to establish peace with the armed groups of the national races as a matter of top priority. Accordingly, 17 armed groups have now returned to the legal fold and joined hands with the Government, thereby the Government has been able to maintain peace and stability throughout the country. This is the first time in many decades that peace can be maintained for so many years on end.

Efforts are under way to persuade the sole remaining armed group --- one faction of the Karen National Union (KNU) --- to follow the example of other groups and return to the legal fold. This faction of the KNU is at present, still engaged in a futile armed struggle against the Government and still remains intransigent to the overtures for peace.

The KNU which was declared illegal in 1949, has undergone many changes both in its leadership and political programme. Currently, it masquerades as a democratic force and is trying to destabilize the peace and stability achieved so far in the border areas by instigating those armed groups which had already returned to the legal fold to reject the efforts of the Government and people to build a peaceful, prosperous and democratic nation.

However, the fighting strength of the remaining faction of the KNU has considerably declined since some five years ago when most of its ranks and files, who were dissatisfied with the leadership and who wanted peace, broke away from the main organization. It has lost all of its major camps in the country proper and its movements are now limited to operations in the form of small mobile units in certain areas across the border.

land and virgin land, granting large land holdings to private companies. As a result, the private sector alone has added 1.1 million acres to the existing arable land. At present, there are 4.9 million irrigated acres up from 2.52 million acres in 1988-89. At the same time, with a view to provide sufficient water to the agriculture sector, the Government has instituted a substantial programme for the construction of new reservoirs and dams, resulting in considerable increase in irrigated areas. Up to now the Government has constructed 129 dams. Through these efforts for the promotion of agriculture productivity, the Government is aiming to increase its export of rice and to contribute to food supply both domestically and regionally.

The Government has launched a comprehensive plan for the development of border areas and national races. Up to the end of 2001, altogether Kyats 12,188 million had been spent in transportation sector in border areas. In education sector, 366 primary schools, 48 middle schools, 19 high schools, 17 youth training schools and 12 women's domestic science training schools have been opened. With respect to the health care for the national races in border areas, 46 hospitals, one township health centre, 74 clinics, 18 rural health centres and 30 sub-rural health centres have been opened since 1988.

Suppression of narcotic drugs

The border areas of the Union of Myanmar have lagged behind other parts of the country in development owing to inadequate infrastructure and internal insurgency problems in the past. It is in these areas that most of the country's 135 national races reside. As the terrain is rough and mountainous, most areas are hard to reach. So the local populace relied totally on poppy cultivation which, unlike other perishable produce, does not need to depend on roads for transports. Years of ignorance made them insensitive in the past to the effects that opiate drugs have on the society and mankind.

Needless to say, the poppy cultivation was introduced into the country by the colonialists as it is not indigenous to Myanmar. Opium dens were even allowed to open freely in the country despite strong objection from the people, Buddhist clergy and the American Baptist missionaries. Later, in the early 1950s, the Kumintang (KMT) troops which were forced out of the Southern Yunan Province of China by the People's Liberation Army of the People's Republic of China, took refuge and established base camps in Myanmar territory. They were encouraged, supported and financed by a western power with the aim of blocking further communist expansion in Asia. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the CIA encouraged the production of opium in the region to help finance its own activities and its KMT allies. The proceeds were also used to pay for the considerable arsenal of arms supplied to the KMT and other various groups in Myanmar. No doubt, these activities also sowed the seeds of the current drug production problems in the border areas of Myanmar. After the bulk of the KMT were flown out of Myanmar, remnants of two divisions of the KMT remained active in those areas until 1996. They encouraged not only poppy cultivation in the golden triangle area as well as on the Myanmar-Yunan (PRC) border, but were also responsible for the refining of opium into heroin and creating heroin markets in the region.

A growth rate of slightly over 10 percent has been registered in the year 2000-2001. As adequate infrastructure is a precondition for the sustained development of the country, the Government is focusing its efforts on infrastructure development. The Government has completed to-date 170 bridges including 9 major river-crossing bridges, 129 dams, 120 hospitals, 112 universities and colleges, 6223 new basic education schools, 4239 miles of road, 998 miles of new railroads, and 6 new airports to mention just a few statistics.

For the economic development of the country, another sector to which the Government is paying particular attention is the agriculture sector. The current economic system of Myanmar is mainly based on agriculture; the agricultural sector, on which over 70 percent of the nation's population are relying, is also based on the rural areas. Till now, the first short-term four-year national economic plan and the second five-year short-term national economic plan had been implemented with the participation of all available forces of the nation. Due to the public participation, the targets of the respected sectors of the plans were over-fulfilled.

At present, the third five-year short-term national economic plan from 2001-2002 to 2005-2006 is being implemented for continued progress of the national economy. The aims of the plans are: to extend agro-based industries; to develop the power sector in accord with the growing demand of the industrial sector; to extend the agricultural and livestock breeding sectors to ensure domestic sufficiency and to boost exports; to develop other sectors; to extend health and education tasks and to develop the rural areas for progress of human resources.

Rural area development sector was among the objectives of the third short-term five-year plan being implemented. Priority is given to the development of rural areas where over 70 per cent of the population live. Requirements of the villages are to be fulfilled. Transport and communications, water supply, development of agriculture, livestock breeding, education and health are main requirements of rural areas. With the aim of poverty reduction in rural areas, these basic practical needs are to be fulfilled in cooperation with the entire people.

Accordingly, the guidances have been given to carry out five rural development tasks namely agriculture, sufficiency of drinking water, better transportation, uplift of health and education starting from 2000-2001 with the assistance of the respective departments and local people. Altogether 484 tube wells, dams and lakes, 170 rural roads, 50 bridges, 679 schools and 119 rural health care centres have been built in 2001-2002.

The agricultural sector of Myanmar accounts for 38 percent of GDP, 40 percent of total exports and employs 63 percent of total labour force. Therefore, agriculture sector occupied a place of importance in Myanmar economy. With a favourable ratio of population to land and abundant water resource, it is also an area Myanmar has a marked comparative advantage. For this reason, the first of the four national economic objectives of the Government is the development of agriculture as the base for all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well. To promote agriculture productivity, the Government has laid down five strategic measures under which it is carrying out an extensive programme of land reclamation in wet

On the other hand, family members, sympathizers and supporters of the KNU are still based in the so-called refugee camps established across the border since the 1980s to elicit the support and sympathy of the international community. These camps are used by the KNU as a safe haven as they store their weapons there and launch attacks on the Government and the local populace of Myanmar.

It must be listed out that unfounded allegations and accusations against the Government emanate from these camps and also from the pocket areas in the frontier areas of the country where KNU remnant still hide. These allegations were quoted by those who bear ill-will against the Government as "credible sources" of news regarding Myanmar and thus deliberately misleading the world community.

However, the Government, with sincerity and patience still extends an olive branch to the remaining faction of KNU and is ready to receive them back, including those living in the so-called refugee camps. In fact, in response to the goodwill gestures of the Government, one faction of the KNU -- the Democratic Karen Buddhist Association (DKBA) -- has already returned to the legal fold. So did hundreds and hundreds of the remaining members of the KNU and they were warmly welcomed by the authorities by providing assistance. They have realized the genuine goodwill of the Government and are now participating in the regional activities. As many more are continuously coming into the legal fold, soon, the Kayin State will be a part of the development activities in the country.

Now is the time for the leader of the remaining faction of the KNU to seriously consider their main objectives for the Kayin people and to commit themselves to bring peace and prosperity to their people and to the whole nation as well. They can look at the other armed national groups who have come into the legal fold and are working together with the Government for the betterment of their respective peoples. The remaining faction of the KNU would be welcomed similarly with open arms and their aspirations to develop their own race will be realized in a peaceful manner.

Economic development of the country

With the restoration of peace and stability, the Government is now able to focus on nation-building, modernization of the country and its economic, social and cultural development.

The market-oriented economic policy of the Government and its full encouragement of the private sector has led to the achievement of sustained economic growth for the country over the several past years. The country achieved an average annual growth rate of 8.4 percent against the original target of 6 percent in its five-year plan from 1996-97 to 2000-2001. Total investment increased by an average annual growth rate of 31.6 percent during the plan period. This achievement was attained relying almost entirely on the country's own resources and foreign direct investment and also without the benefit of official development assistance (ODA) and concessional loans.

Abuse and illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs bring about crimes and undesirable activities like money laundering and deterioration of the moral characters of the population. The drug issue is a major socio-economic challenge to mankind. As it is a threat to the right of the people to enjoy a decent quality of life, the Government of the Union of Myanmar has been carrying out anti-narcotics measures as a national endeavour. In so doing, Myanmar has always contributed unstintingly to the fight against narcotic drugs. Myanmar has also made great sacrifices. 776 of her soldiers sacrificed their lives and 2350 sustained injuries from the period 1988 to 1997.

The Government regards the suppression of narcotic drugs as a national task and the top priority. It has made all-out efforts for a three pronged attacks aiming at supply reduction, demand reduction and law enforcement. As stated above, certain border areas of Myanmar have totally relied on poppy cultivation in the past. To totally change this situation, the Government has decided that it must strive for the development of border areas and national races. To this end, a Central Committee for the Development of Border Areas and National Races was formed on 25 May 1989. For more effective implementation of border areas and national races development, a separate ministry was instituted on 24 September 1992 and the Law on Development of Border Areas and the National Races was promulgated on 13 August 1993. The main purpose of the Law is the total elimination of poppy cultivation through creation of alternative economic activities for the local populace.

Myanmar has drawn up and is implementing a 15-year Narcotic Elimination Plan from 1999/2000 to 2013/2014 with its own resources. The objective of the Plan is to totally eradicate the opium cultivation in 51 Townships of the Shan State, Kachin State, Kayah State and Chin State and narcotic abuse in the whole country. In implementing the Plan, the 5 priority areas are eradicating poppy cultivation, eliminating drug abuse, enforcement, organizing the local populace to participate in the activities and international relations. Opium cultivation decreased 30 per cent compared with the previous year. This received world recognition. The Government of Myanmar has invested 5613.569 million of Kyats and 150 million US dollars in its campaign against drug abuse. The problem of drugs is not confined to an individual, a race or a country. It is a problem of the whole human race. Myanmar will not waiver from this task and continue to combat this horrible scourge until it achieves its goal --- a drug-free nation.

Mongla area has been declared as drug-free zone on 22 April 1997 --- the first such drug-free zone in the world. Arrangements are under way to establish other areas as drug-free zones one after another.

Accordingly, several areas have been declared opium-free zones and poppy cultivators have now turned to alternative crops and stepped-up law enforcement measures have led to increase seizures of narcotic drugs. From 1998 to 2001 a total of 843047.72 acres of poppy plantation were destroyed by the Government and the local populace. As crop substitution, buckwheat is being cultivated in these areas with the assistance from Japan. On the other hand, law enforcement personnel regularly seize and destroy illicit drugs and heroin refining laboratories. Members of the Diplomatic Corps and journalists are always invited to attend the large-scale destructions of narcotic drugs.

Myanmar also played host to the Fourth International Heroin Conference in Yangon in February 1999. This conference was attended by delegates from 28 countries and it contributed to enhance cooperation and understanding among nations to combat the war on drugs. While in Yangon, delegates to the Conference took part in, and witnessed the destruction of narcotic drugs in Myanmar.

One of the reasons why the authorities of Myanmar decided to accept the Conference to be held in Yangon is because Myanmar believes that with the cooperation of the international community, Myanmar's fight against narcotic drugs can and will be more effective. The Secretary General of the INTERPOL, in his message to the conference commented that *"it is high time the international community becomes acquainted with the excellent work that is being carried out in Myanmar against the illicit production and trafficking of heroin"*.

Myanmar has been continuously working together with United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the nations which have signed Memorandum of Understanding on narcotic drugs control and regional development. In the International Narcotic Control Board (INCB) report 2000, it was mentioned that illicit opium production in Myanmar has declined in recent years.

In 2001 INCB report it was mentioned that significant bilateral efforts are being made, for example, by Myanmar and Thailand, which intend to exchange drug liaison officers, to improve contact between drug control officers along their common border and to cooperate in combating drug trafficking at the international airports of Bangkok and Yangon. The Board welcomed that development, as it views such cooperation as an essential element in efforts to curb the substantial flow of illicit drugs between those two countries. Significant results such as the arrest of top-level drug traffickers have been achieved because of improved cross-border cooperation between China and Myanmar.

In May 2001, the Board reviewed the progress of the Government of Myanmar on recommendations made by the Board pursuant to its 1998 mission to Myanmar and in September 2001, the Board sent a mission to the country. The Board found that continuous efforts were being made to implement its recommendations following its mission to Myanmar in 1998.

It was stated that although the widespread opium poppy cultivation remains a problem in Myanmar, illicit opium poppy cultivation and opium production have decreased, drug seizures have increased and "opium-free zones" have been established over the last few years. The Board notes that the Government of Myanmar has been fully committed to the eradication of illicit opium poppy cultivation in the country and that continuous efforts have been made to deal with the situation regarding drug abuse and illicit trafficking, as evidenced by the initiation in 1999 of a 15-year plan to eliminate illicit drugs in the country.

The Board further notes that the limited resources and the low level of external assistance provided to Myanmar have had a negative impact on the Government's ability to achieve the goals set out in its eradication programme and to consolidate the gains already made. The Board therefore calls upon the international community to provide the necessary assistance to Myanmar as long as its efforts to fight against drug abuse and illicit trafficking are sustained.

While the issue of the illicit production and trafficking in heroin is being tackled, a synthetic drug in the name of *methamphetamine* has forced its way into the regional drug scene. This drug has surfaced in Myanmar just over two years ago. Anti-narcotic officials of Myanmar are cooperating with the countries and organizations in the region that have more experience and expertise for the control of this drug.

In 2001 INCB report it was mentioned that the illicit manufacture of methamphetamine remains a problem in border areas of Myanmar. The Board called on the Government to continue to cooperate with the Governments of neighbouring countries in law enforcement activities and, in particular, to make additional efforts to identify sources and routes of seized precursor chemicals and to share such information with those Governments. The Board noted the ministerial meeting on drug control cooperation between China, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand held in Beijing on 28 August 2001 and hoped that the drug problems in East and South-East Asia will be dealt with in a more effective way through coordinated subregional and regional mechanisms.

The United States State Department's annual report on Myanmar mentioned that 60% of opium production in Myanmar had been already decreased and the number of drug related arrests and seizures of various kinds of drugs had positively increased. The annual report also mentioned that the cooperations and initiatives with the neighbouring countries and other anti-narcotic institutions have already positively taken place, in an unprecedented profile.

The United States Opium Yield Survey Team is working closely with Myanmar officials annually for eight consecutive years including 2002 in Myanmar.

Drug menace is a global problem, requiring a global response. Accordingly there is a growing consensus of the need for concerted efforts of the world community based on the principle of shared responsibility. As for Myanmar, she is committed to the total elimination of narcotic drugs --- be it with or without the outside assistance. The Government and the people of the Union of Myanmar will continue to abide by this commitment with dedication and will carry out the task to the end. But for those with vested interests, it would be better for them to put politics aside and work for that common goal just for the sake of millions of people around the world whose lives are threatened and affected by this drug trade.

The elimination of narcotic drugs also facilitates the alleviation of poverty in the border areas. By working for the elimination of drugs, the populace of the border areas will also achieve at the same time better health care, education and infrastructure development and better life style. Bearing

The Government firmly believes that the National Convention is the only political process suitable for Myanmar and that consensus will be achieved finally for a system which will ensure enduring peace, stability and prosperity in the country.

The Myanmar Government has managed to achieve the national reconsolidation and nation-building, an achievement which previous Governments were not able to accomplish and has also promoted peace and stability in the country. On the other hand, political and economic development is still sensitive and fragile and one false move could get the country to slide back into chaos and anarchic situation. With this in mind, it would not be difficult to understand why the government is determined to keep the momentum.

In this perspective, it is also important for the political parties in Myanmar to abide by the existing laws of the country. The Government does not interfere with the activities of the political parties when they pursue their work within the boundaries of the laws.

Like other political parties, the National League for Democracy (NLD) also enjoys all its rights and responsibilities under the existing laws. The representatives-elect of the NLD took part in the National Convention process up till November 1995. It was the representatives-elect of the NLD themselves who withdrew from the National Convention of their own accord.

Given the specific characteristics of Myanmar and the prevailing conditions in the country, there is no other way than the process of the National Convention. By convening the National Convention, we are taking progressive and systematic steps to establish a peaceful, modern and developed democratic State in accordance with the aspiration of the people of Myanmar.

The Government is committed to establish a democratic society in the country according to the aspirations of its countrymen. As the Government is transitional in nature, it does not intend to exercise state power any longer than it is necessary and this stance has been repeated time and again. It will transfer the state power to the people by convening a parliament once a firm and enduring state constitution has been adopted.

However, a constitutional process in a country can proceed only as far and as fast as circumstances permit. Myanmar is no exception, but the Government is doing its utmost for the advancement of the democratization process in the most expeditious manner.

In fulfilling its responsibility to implement the transition of the country from one political and economic system to another, the Government has to balance the political rights of one person or one political party with the rights of the whole population to live in peace and security. It also has to see the right to development of the entire population. At present, the Government views the right of the whole population to be of greater importance.

these lofty goals in mind, the Government will continue to implement the 15-year plan and will at the same time cooperate with other ASEAN countries to achieve the vision of a "Drug Free ASEAN" by the year 2020.

Process of democratization

The establishment of a democratic society in the Union of Myanmar is the cherished goal of the Myanmar people. As they are fully committed to the achievement of this goal, they are now laying grounds for the emergence of such a democratic state. Such a democratic system ought to reflect the aspirations of all the 135 national races of the country. While laying the ground work for a multi-party democratic system, the Government regards itself as a transitional government for the benefit and interest of the people and the nation. In other words, it is in the process of establishing and consolidating national unity, peace, stability and all-round development in the country in order that Myanmar may become a peaceful, prosperous, modern and developed nation in a not too-distant future.

A strong and enduring state constitution is a pre-requisite for building a multi-party democratic state. Myanmar has had two constitutions since her independence from Britain. The first (1947) Constitution was drafted in haste and according to Britain's requirements. Serious flaws were embedded in it, and one of which was the question of secession of the national races after ten years of independence. The insurgency problem which still haunts the country is the legacy of this constitution. In 1962, after the military took over the state power, the 1947 Constitution was abolished and a new one-party socialist constitution came into existence in 1974. Again this constitution was abolished in 1988 for a multiparty democratic system.

The country has gone through hard times because of the way some political parties acted in the past and also due to the inherent weakness of the previous constitutions. To keep the country perpetually stable and to have a functioning democracy, it is essential for Myanmar to have a strong and enduring constitution.

With this in mind, the National Convention, a disciplined forum for political dialogue has been convening with the aim to lay down fundamental principles to be enshrined in the future state constitution. All political parties as well as representatives from all strata of society are taking part in the convention giving their opinions and discussing to finalize the state constitution that would reflect the aspirations of all the 135 national races, residing in the Union. Through open and frank deliberations, the delegates have so far managed to reach consensus on 18 chapters and 104 basic principles. At the moment, the National Convention and Working Committees of the National Convention are working on the basic principles in the matter of power sharing between the central organs of the State and those of the States and Divisions. The delegates will be able to discuss this important and sensitive issue when the National Convention reconvenes. In view of the sensitive nature and its far-reaching implications for the future of the country, it is vital for the National Convention to proceed with great caution to safeguard the interest of all national races and not to repeat the shortcomings of the previous constitutions.

Attempts from the outside to set the pace and influence direction for Myanmar would not only hinder the process of democratization but also prove to be counterproductive. However, the Government of the Union of Myanmar will continue to be resolute in its commitment to establish a genuine multi-party democracy and will not waver from the political agenda it has laid down.

Positive developments regarding the recommendations of the ILC

The Union of Myanmar with her recorded history of over three thousand years, is rich in culture and tradition. Among the traditional customs endeavoured in Myanmar since time immemorial and which is still in practice is the contribution of labour. Myanmar nationals believe that the contribution of labour is both meritorious and conducive to mental and physical well-being.

But in the past, when insurgency problem was rampant in the country, the Armed Forces members have sometimes had to employ civilian labourers to transport equipment and supplies over difficult terrain in the remote areas during military operations. Wages and other basic needs were adequately provided to the labourers in accordance with the rules and regulations of the country. Even such use of civilian labourers by the Armed Forces is not in practice now as almost all the armed groups have returned to the legal fold. The Government does not practise or condone the practice of forced labour.

But in recent years, there had been numerous allegations of the practice of forced labour in Myanmar and also that the relevant sections of the existing Village Act and the Towns Act of 1907, a legacy from the British colonial rule, were not compatible with the Forced Labour Convention 1930 (No.29).

As a result of the review process of the two Acts to bring in line with the current situations of the country, the Home Ministry issued Order No.1/99 on 14 May 1999, which instructs the Village Tract and Ward Peace and Development Councils and other local authorities concerned not to exercise the powers under those provisions of the two Acts relating to requisition for personal services. As the Order No. 1/99 was issued under the Directive of the State Peace and Development Council, which is the law-making body of the nation, it has the full force of law.

It is important to note here that the Commission of Inquiry recommended only to bring the Village Act and the Towns Act of 1907 in line with the ILO Convention (29). The recommendations do not specify the legal modalities of accomplishing this objective. As a matter of fact this objective was accomplished by the Myanmar authorities by the promulgation of Order No. 1/99 of 14 May 1999.

As a long-standing member of the ILO, Myanmar has maintained the tradition of closely cooperating with the organization. To keep in line with this tradition, the Government of the Union of Myanmar had on 14 October 1999 invited a technical team of ILO to visit the country in order that the two sides could discuss issues of mutual interest.

Myanmar's cooperation with the ILO has been characterized by the frequent visits of the ILO Technical cooperation missions and the High Level Team (HLT).

The first TCM team led by Mr. Francis Maupain, Special Advisor to the Director-General of ILO visited Myanmar from 23 to 27 May 2000 and held wide-ranging discussions with the authorities and officials of the Government of Myanmar. The first TCM had extensive discussions on various aspects of the existing Myanmar laws, prohibiting the use of forced labour, which is punishable under Section 374 of the Penal Code.

The Mission duly acknowledged in its report to the 88th ILC that the government authorities fully honoured their commitment to give the mission the necessary freedom of action to make contacts and agreed to adjust the programme of meetings with government representatives in order to allow other talks to take place.

The second TCM visited Myanmar from 20 to 26 October 2000. The TCM recognized with appreciation the comprehensive framework of legislative, administrative and executive measures taken by the Myanmar Government and implementation of the recommendations by the ILC.

Immediately following the visit of the Technical Cooperation Mission, the Government of Myanmar, with the suggestions and advises by the TCM, issued the Order Supplementing the Order No. 1/99 on 27 October 2000 by which it prohibits forced labour in the country and thereby showing to the world its seriousness and its commitment to the principles of ILO.

The TCM team indicated in its report to the 279th Meeting of the Governing Body that Myanmar Government has made progress and that there is a political will at the highest level of the Myanmar Government towards achieving a definitive solution.

The Myanmar observer representative to the 279th Meeting of the ILO Governing Body stated that Myanmar is also willing to accept an ILO representative either based in the Regional Office in Bangkok or based in Geneva, to observe, assess or assist the national supervisory mechanism in the implementation of Convention 29 on Forced Labour.

Development at the 279th Meeting of the Governing Body

At the 279th Meeting of the Governing Body of the ILO, in recognition of the efforts by Myanmar, Malaysia, on behalf of the ASEAN member states of the ILO namely Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam, made a joint statement urging the Governing Body to take into account the latest positive developments, and Myanmar and the ILO to continue cooperation and to remain engaged in finding a lasting and effective solution. The joint statement was supported by Sudan, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Algeria. Malaysia as a Titular Member of the Governing Body, also tabled a counter draft

However, despite repeated requests by Malaysia, the Chairman of the Governing Body did not have the draft resolution circulated to all Members of the Governing Body. Nor did he put it to a vote and the Governing Body eventually decided that all measures adopted at the 88th ILC would take effect on 30 November 2000 as the Governing Body as a whole was not satisfied with the progress in Myanmar. Furthermore, the Chairman ended the meeting abruptly thereby depriving the members from delivering their statements explaining their positions after the vote.

The Myanmar observer delegation made an oral protest to the Director-General of the ILO against the unfair and improper conduct of the meeting. It also handed its undelivered statement to the Director-General of the ILO and transmitted to the Chairman of the Governing Body, and requested them that it be circulated as the official document of the ILO.

In the Statement, the Permanent Representative of Myanmar stated that as the Governing Body's decision is most unfair, unreasonable, unjust and is totally unacceptable, Myanmar delegation totally and categorically rejects the decision and dissociates itself from it and any activities and effects connected with it. Accordingly, Myanmar would cease to cooperate with the ILO in relations to the ILO Convention 29 and any activity connected to it.

Subsequently, the Permanent Representative of Myanmar also wrote a letter to the Chairman of the Governing Body, lodging a protest against the unfair and improper conduct of the Governing Body.

It is crystal clear that the present situation arose out of the attempts by some Western countries to exert undue pressure on Myanmar and isolate it.

The ILO Special Mission led by Mr. Francis Maupain, visited Myanmar from 17 to 19 May 2001. It resulted in the signing of the Understanding between the Myanmar Government and the ILO on the Modalities of an ILO Objective Assessment.

The Understanding which reached between the Government of Myanmar and the International Labour Office is to receive a High Level Team (HLT) to carry out an objective assessment of the practical implementation and actual impact of the framework of legislative, executive and administrative measures.

Accordingly, the High Level Team (HLT) led by the Right Honourable Sir Ninian Stephen, former Governor-General of Australia; Ms. Nieves Roldan-Confessor, Former Secretary of Labour and Employment of the Philippines; Mr. Kulatilaka Arthanayake Parinda Ranasinghe, Former Chief Justice of Sri Lanka; and Mr. Jerzy Makarczyk, Judge, European Court of Human Rights and Former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland visited Myanmar from 17 September to 6 October 2001.

The HLT carried out an objective assessment of the situation in Myanmar and has submitted a report to the 282nd Governing Body.

While in Yangon, the members of the High Level Team called on His Excellency Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council on 5 October 2001 and His Excellency Lieutenant General Khin Nyunt, Secretary (1) of the State Peace and Development Council on 21 September 2001.

They met a number of Ministers and various governmental committees and NGOs.

The HLT conducted extensive field trips to various States and Division, i.e. Mon State, Kayin State, Northern Shan State and Taninthayi Division.

The HLT was allowed to use their own private chartered aircraft for their trips in the country and the government supplied hotel accommodations, meals and motor transport for them on such field trips.

While in various parts of the country, the HLT was given freedom of movement and free access to meet whoever person they would like to meet and wherever they would like to go. In so doing they met the members of the NLD party including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, members of the Diplomatic Corps and UN Specialized Agencies in Yangon.

Report of the High Level Team to the 282nd Session of the ILO Governing Body

In its report, the HLT stated that "the Government fully honoured its obligations under the Understanding on an ILO Objective Assessment not to interfere with the work of the HLT" and that it "expresses its appreciation of the excellent arrangements which had been made by the Government to assist it in the discharge of its mandate".

The HLT in its report mentioned that the special and unique value of these field trips was that they enabled the team members to conduct many random interviews, in the absence of Government representatives, with individuals in the streets of towns and villages, in private homes, in teashops and in other public places. It also reported that they enjoyed full freedom and none of their requests was turned down on the security grounds. It even mentioned that on a couple of occasions when ambushes had recently taken place, the authorities insisted on the presence of a military escort for its protection.

It also reported that "in contrast to the situation reported in 1998 by the Commission of Inquiry, the HLT found no indications of the current use of forced labour on civil infrastructure projects".

His Excellency U Mya Than, Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar also presented a statement. In his statement, the Permanent Representative acknowledged that the report is fairly balanced, forward-looking and quite constructive though there are some points which Myanmar

continuing to cooperate with the ILO in its efforts to resolve the issue of forced labour.

He also reiterated that Myanmar is not completely ruling out some form of ILO permanent representation.

After examination of the report of the High Level Team and deliberations, the Governing Body made conclusions on the issue. The salient points are as follows:-

- (a) The Governing Body requests the Director-General to pursue the dialogue with Myanmar authorities to define modalities and parameters of continued and effective ILO representation in Myanmar;
- (b) The Director-General should also continue to provide assistance to the authorities with regard to establishing a form of ombudsman;
- (c) The Director-General has to report to the next session of the Governing Body depending on the progress or lack of progress on the issue, including the criminal proceedings in paragraph 28 of the report (Kon Heng incident), the Governing Body has to draw appropriate conclusion.

The ILO Team's recent visit to Myanmar

As indicated earlier, the Permanent Representative of the Union of Myanmar, at the November 2001 Governing Body session, has stated that Myanmar is not completely ruling out some form of ILO representation in the country.

True to his words, and after careful consideration, Myanmar authorities invited the Director-General of the ILO to send an ILO Team to visit Myanmar to discuss the matters regarding the conclusions adopted by the 282nd session of the ILO Governing Body on Myanmar's observance of Convention 29.

Thus, the ILO Team led by Mr. Francis Maupain visited Myanmar from 19 to 22 February 2002.

Visit of the ILO Technical Cooperation Mission (TCM) in February 2002

The latest development was the visit of a Technical Cooperation Mission led by Mr. Francis Maupain, Senior Adviser to the Director-General of the ILO from 19 to 25 February 2002. The purpose of the visit was to discuss and reach agreement on the format and modalities of possible ILO presence in Myanmar.

While in the country, the ILO Team met the Minister for Labour, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and officials from various Ministries and the Attorney-General's Office. The Myanmar officials and the ILO TCM held discussions on the format and modalities of the possible ILO presence in Myanmar.

In the course of the discussions, the ILO Team insisted on an ILO representation office in Yangon.

The Myanmar side, on the other hand, approached the discussions with a genuine desire to cooperate as much as possible with the ILO and the main topic in the talks was the issue of ILO presence in the country.

Previously, Myanmar had all along insisted that, while, she is not rejecting the idea of some form of ILO presence, it could be achieved by occasional visits by the ILO Teams either based in Bangkok or in Geneva.

Nonetheless, during the recent talks in Yangon, the Myanmar side expressed its readiness to accept the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in Myanmar. The Myanmar side was also prepared to work out the necessary modalities between the ILO and Myanmar as soon as possible.

However, the TCM insisted on the establishment of an ILO representation office in Myanmar rather than a Liaison Officer.

Myanmar's proposal for the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer

Myanmar has been following a step by step approach. Consistent with this approach and in keeping with the statements of the Myanmar representative, the Myanmar side has made the very significant and reasonable offer to accept the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in the country. This constitutes a major step forward which is unthinkable as recently as November 2001.

Summary of the proceedings at the 283rd session of the ILO Governing Body

The signing of the Understanding between the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the ILO on the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in Myanmar

A landmark agreement between the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the International Labour Office on an appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in Myanmar was signed by Mr. Kari Tapiola, Executive Director of the International Labour Office and His Excellency Ambassador U Mya Than, Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar at the ILO Headquarters on 19 March 2002.

Under the Understanding, the Government of the Union of Myanmar has agreed to the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in Myanmar by the Director-General of the ILO not later than June 2002. This will contribute to the further cooperation between the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the ILO.

This constitutes a breakthrough agreement in the history of cooperation between the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the ILO. It will go a long way in carrying forward the process of dialogue and cooperation between the two sides, and will contribute to, and assist in the efforts by the Government to ensure that there will be no instances of the use of forced labour in Myanmar.

Deliberations at the 283rd session of the ILO Governing Body and the outcome of the meeting

At the meeting of the Governing Body devoted to the question of Myanmar, Ambassador U Mya Than, Permanent Representative of Myanmar characterized the Understanding as a "landmark agreement". He reiterated that Myanmar was fully committed to the elimination of forced labour in Myanmar. He further explained the effective measures taken by the Myanmar to that end. He called upon the Governing Body, in the light of the aforementioned positive developments, to recommend to the 90th session of the ILC to place the item on its agenda, and to review the situation with the view to removing all the measures, taken by the ILO against Myanmar under the Article 33 of the ILO Constitution.

This request was formally tabled to the Governing Body by the representative of Malaysia in a joint statement by the ASEAN member states and Sudan, Bangladesh. A number of other Government representatives including Japan, India, Pakistan, China, Libya, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, US, EU, Switzerland, Chief Workers' delegate and Chief employers' delegate also welcomed the important steps taken by Myanmar Government by signing the aforementioned Understanding with the ILO.

Following constructive discussions on the question, the Chairman on behalf of the Governing Body, made a summing up. The Governing Body, inter alia:-

- welcomed the signing of the Understanding between the Government of Myanmar and the ILO for the appointment by June 2002 of an Liaison Officer in Myanmar.
- recognized that this discussion of the proposal by the ASEAN Member States to place the item on Myanmar on the agenda of the 90th ILC and to review the situation with a view to removing any measures taken against Myanmar under Article 33 of the Constitution of the ILO constituted the first discussion of the question; and
- decided that the Governing Body could return to the question at its 90th session in November 2002.

It is hoped that this positive outcome of the 283rd session of the Governing Body will pave the way for further cooperation between Myanmar and the ILO and will eventually lead to the lifting of all the sanctions taken by the ILO against Myanmar under the Article 33 of the ILO Constitution.

Developments in the field of human rights

The Government of Myanmar has shown its commitment to improve the cooperation with the United Nations by accepting the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Razali Ismail and the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro to visit Myanmar.

The UN Special Envoy Mr. Razali Ismail made a seventh visit to Myanmar in January 2002 since he was appointed as the Special Envoy in April 2000. Regarding his recent visit, a statement was issued by the United Nations by which it stated that he was hopeful that some significant progress could be achieved in the near future in the talks of national reconciliation.

Mr. Razali has also taken a role to assess the level of cooperation between the government and national groups who returned to the legal fold during the late 1980s. He travelled to the border areas in Shan State during his visit and met with the leaders of ethnically based political parties.

During the past one year, a significant progress in cooperation with the Human Rights Commission has been made when the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Commission, Professor Paulo Sergio Pinheiro visited Myanmar in April 2001. The Government of Myanmar has accepted the visit of the Special Rapporteur for the first time in six years and fully cooperated with him to the extent possible in order to inform the international community the real situation in the country. He submitted a fairly balanced report to the Commission.

After his visit to Myanmar for the second time in October 2001, Professor Pinheiro submitted a report to the UNGA. In his report, it was mentioned that he received full and unhindered cooperation on the part of the Myanmar Government during his mission. He commented in his report that since the ongoing confidence-building contacts between the State Peace and Development Council and the leader of the NLD during the last twelve months, the Government of Myanmar is trying to address several of the human rights concerns of the Commission on Human Rights and to support several positive initiatives. Those include the dissemination of human rights standards for the police and public officials through a series of training workshops with the support of the Australian Government and cooperate funding; the establishment of the governmental Committee on Human Rights to pave the way for the establishment of a human rights institution based on the Paris Principles; the releases of political detainees; the better conditions in the prisons.

Mr. Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, visited Myanmar, third time in a year, from 10 to 19 February 2002. During his visit, Mr. Pinheiro held meeting with Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, Secretary 1 of the State Peace and Development Council and senior officials of the Government, judicial authorities, religious dignitaries and responsible persons from the Human Rights Committee. He visited the Kachin State where he had a chance to meet the local people freely. He met with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. According to the news, Mr. Pinheiro said that he was given unfettered access to political prisoners and had impression that there's no abuse against those he interviewed. He said that the detainees in Myanmar face improved prison conditions after 150 missions by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). When he met with the reporters in Bangkok on 22 February 2002, the United Nations Human Rights Envoy called for the world to forge a "principled" engagement with the Government of Myanmar.

The Special Rapporteur will deliver his report at the fifty-eighth session of the Human Rights Commission in March 2002.

As a gesture of goodwill, the Government has released altogether 246 persons till 15 March 2002. They were being held with the intent to maintain peace and stability in the country and for their transgression of laws. There are also several other detainees being released from time to time from various correctional facilities but are not included in the release list.

As at 21 March 2002, altogether 318 female detainees with young children and mothers-to-be charged and detained for various criminal activities were being granted amnesty and released from various correctional facilities.

Religious tolerance

Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist country as nearly ninety percent of its population of over 48 million are Buddhists. Understandably, those citizen of other faiths may be concerned about possible persecution or intolerance by another faith which is dominant. This concern, which is without reason, has been exploited by some for their own political motivation. Based on this misinformation, allegations on religious intolerance in Myanmar were deliberately made to mislead the public opinion of the international community.

Nothing can be further from the truth. As a matter of fact, religious harmony and freedom in Myanmar is well known to the outside world. The Government of the Union of Myanmar fully believes the importance of religious freedom in a multi-racial country like Myanmar and gives equal treatment to all the religions in the country. Our previous two Constitutions provided for safeguards against religious discrimination and religious intolerance. Similarly, the fundamental principles we have agreed upon in the National Convention process guarantee religious indiscrimination and religious tolerance.

As religious harmony and freedom in the country is a tradition shared by all faiths, the Government has taken all necessary steps to encourage this prevailing harmony. This is done by continuous contacts with the respective religious leaderships and providing necessary assistance in both financial and material terms in order that they may be able to promote their faiths effectively.

The Government is determined to promote and protect, to the best of its ability, all the religions in the country and help all religious groups in all possible ways to co-exist harmoniously with each other.

The right to development

The most fundamental and essential requirement for a country like Myanmar is to fulfill the basic needs of the people---food, clothing and shelter and also to raise their standard of living. Other aspects of human rights cannot be effectively implemented without fulfilling these basic rights. Civil and political rights are important but the Myanmar people believes that economic, social and cultural rights are equally important.

With this belief, the Government is making efforts for the advancement of economic and social conditions in the country where peace and tranquillity prevail currently. A transition from a socialist economy to an open-market one was made and the private sector plays the major component of the market system. It has led the achievement of sustained economic growth for the country over the past several years. Myanmar achieved an average annual growth rate of 8.4 percent against the original target of 6 percent in its five-year plan from 1996-1997 to 2000-2001. During the plan period, total investment also increased by an annual growth rate of 31.6 percent. This was achieved entirely by the country's own resources and foreign direct investment, without the benefit of ODA (Official Development Assistance) and concessional loans.

For the sustained development of the country, an adequate infrastructure is a pre-requisite and the Government is focusing its efforts on infrastructure development. The Government has completed to-date 170 bridges including 9 major river-crossing bridges, 129 dams, 120 hospitals, 112 universities and colleges, 6223 new basic education schools, 4239 miles of road, 998 miles of new railroads, and 6 new airports to mention just a few statistics and also border area development on an unprecedented scale for national races living in frontier areas.

Another sector to which the Government is paying particular attention is the agriculture sector. This sector accounts for the 42 percent of GDP, 40 percent of total exports and employs 65 percent of total labour force. Therefore, economic sector occupies a place of importance in Myanmar economy. With a favourable ratio of population to land, and abundant water resource, topographical conditions and natural resources, it is also an area Myanmar has a marked comparative advantage. For this, the first of the four national economic objectives of the Government is the development of agriculture, the base for all-round development of other sectors of the

With the aim of promoting the agriculture sector, the Government has laid down five strategic measures under which it is carrying out the programme of extensive land reclamation in wet land and virgin land, and granting large land holding to private companies. As a result, the private sector has added 1.1 million acres to the existing arable land. To provide sufficient water, new reservoirs and dams were constructed. The aim of the Government is to increase its rice export and to contribute to food supply both domestically and regionally.

Rights of the child and the status of women

To upgrade the standards of health, education and fitness, the Government has laid down its social objectives accordingly and relevant ministries are working toward the successful realization of these objectives.

The Government believes that in order to uplift the morality of the country, the rights of women and children must be protected and further promoted as these groups form the most vulnerable groups. To reach this goal is to work within the framework of the UN system and accordingly Myanmar became State party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and in 1997 acceded to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The initial reports were already submitted to the respective committees. These measures clearly demonstrate the importance the Government attaches to the welfare of women and children of the nation.

The Child Law was promulgated in 1993 and the National Committee on the Rights of the Child was formed to effectively implement the provisions of the Law. Apart from it, Committees on the Rights of the Child were also formed in State, Division and District levels. Juvenile courts were established and township judges were conferred as Juvenile Judges in areas where no such courts were established yet. The departments of health, basic education and social welfare have carried out the programmes of action in collaboration with the UNICEF.

Though there are constraints in carrying out the task of implementing the Convention fully and the fact was mentioned in the National Report of Myanmar to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Myanmar is doing its utmost to overcome the difficulties on its own resources.

The Myanmar women have played an important role in many aspects of the country, but the most prominent movement is in social work. They have taken part in enriching and enhancing individual and group development or at promoting social and economic conditions. In the area of promotion and protection of rights of women, the Government has also assumed a leading role for the advancement of women and the Myanmar National Committee for Women Affairs (MNCWA) was formed in 1996.

The Myanmar National Working Committee for Women Affairs (MNWCWA) was subsequently formed to implement the developmental activities for women systematically. This Committee holds meetings every three months and visits various townships throughout the country in order to implement the Plan of Actions. The formation of MNWCWA was followed by the formation of State, Division, District and Township (grass-roots level) working committees for women's affairs. The working committee has identified nine critical areas of concern for the advancement of Myanmar women and they are as follows:-

- 1) Education - The main objective of this area is to promote the enrollment retention and completion of primary education of girls. One of the activities that is being implemented to achieve this objective is to support needy students.
- 2) Health - The sub-committee stresses the promotion of family health and also strengthened the Essential Obstetric-care services.
- 3) Violence Against Women - Although it is not a major issue in Myanmar, the working committee decided to address this issue as it can hinder women's advancement. Counselling centres to give services to the victims of marital violence have been established. A task force for trafficking in women and a group receiving communications directly from the victims are set up to combat violence against women effectively.
- 4) Women and Economy - This sub-committee implement activities such as skill-based or vocational training in non-traditional modern technology to gain easy access to employment. Small loans are given to women casual sellers in the markets.
- 5) Women and Culture - To preserve cultural heritage talks on national heroes, tradition, customs and religion are conducted, with the co-operation of schools and community leaders.
- 6) Women and Environment - Women have actively participated in environmental conservation.
- 7) Women and Media - National media are used to enhance the awareness of the women's role and contributions to the family, community and country and more women are involved in the management of the media.
- 8) The Girl-Child - Although there is no discrimination against the girl-child, the committee implements activities to promote the advancement of the target group.
- 9) International relations - To inform the international community of the efforts of Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs for the promotion of inborn rights of Myanmar women.

Under its auspices, the First and Second Myanmar Women Conferences were held in December 1998 and January 2001 with the aim to develop the life of women in Myanmar. Plan of Actions to bring about interests of women in Myanmar was adopted by the Conference.

The Regional Consultation on Violence against Women and the Role of Health Sector was held in Yangon in early 1999 as the issue of violence against women is of major concern of the world community.

Because of the unique culture, tradition and practice of the society in Myanmar, violence against women is not a major issue in the country. Nevertheless, surveys and research projects are launched in the country in order to obtain more data on this subject. Discussions and seminars on violence against women are held in various townships and counselling is also made available to the women in need of such service.

Lady officials of Myanmar also participated in Beijing Conference, UNGASS (Beijing +5) and ASEAN meetings to exchange experience and knowledge in the field of women issues. In short, the role of Myanmar women plays an important part in the national development process.

Apart from this National Machinery, the NGOs have played a major role in alleviating social and economic conditions. There are many women's organizations and among them are Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), the Myanmar Women's Sports Federation (MWSF), the Women chapter of the Myanmar Medical Association (WCMMA) and the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA) to name a few. These NGOs are working together with the National Committee for the advancement of women. The Government renders assistance to them in order that they may be able to carry out their programmes more efficiently.

The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association (MMCWA), the country's largest non-governmental organization with branches and associations all over the country has been working closely with the Government to promote the health and well-being of mothers and children.

The Association is actively playing a leading role in the following sectors such as catering to the health of mothers and children in urban and rural areas, reducing maternal and infant death rates, conducting training in breast feeding, taking part in National Immunization Day activities, birth spacing projects and taking control measures for AIDS, prevention of iodine deficiency and providing health care services. These could be seen as important activities concerning women and children. The Association also aided the officials of the Health Ministry to draw health plan. The Association received the WHO award for outstanding performance on primary health care.

The Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association is also active in enhancing the role of the Myanmar women. It is implementing income-generating programmes for rural women and give small loans to women who run small-scaled, home-based industry.

The Myanmar Women Sports Federation promotes the participation of women in sports as well as the development of women physically, mentally and morally. The Myanmar women have acclaimed outstanding achievements at international competitions.

Conclusion

The Government of Myanmar is committed to the establishment of a democratic political system and taking steps towards the achievement of that goal. At the same time, the Government is making every effort to improve the overall situation of the country in spite of various constraints and obstacles and undue international political pressures. The fact that peace and stability is now prevailing in areas where insurgencies were wide-spread in the past and the fact that the Government has accomplished many achievements on the political, economic, social and cultural fronts, attest to the measure of the success of the Government's endeavours.

Consideration of the situation of human rights in Myanmar without fully taking into account all aspects of the difficulties, confronted by Myanmar in its transition to a new political system, and the concrete achievements of the Government in many areas, outlined above, will not be fair and balanced by any standards. It is, therefore, hoped that draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Myanmar this year will faithfully reflect the objective situation in the country and the positive measures taken by the Government in a fair and balanced manner.